

Chapter 2: The Planning Process

The Service began developing the Rydell National Wildlife Refuge Comprehensive Conservation Plan in June 1996, and one of the first steps was to form a Citizen Committee that would provide local and regional input to the plan. The 20-member group consisted of local residents, government officials, individuals representing local business interests, representatives from conservation and sportsmen's groups, and representatives from educational institutions.

A kick-off workshop was held with the Citizen Committee on June 11 and 12, 1996. Workshop participants identified several management issues, concerns, and opportunities. A public open house was also held on the evening of June 11 to inform the general public of the planning process and to gather individuals' ideas and concerns. Much of the information gathered from the public has been incorporated into this Comprehensive Conservation Plan.



The Citizen Committee also met on September 19, 1996, and February 12, 1997. Throughout the process, the Citizen Committee reviewed the components of the plan and provided input into the process.

Additional meetings and discussions were held on water management and fishery management.

Reference materials used in the preparation of the CCP include the Environmental Assessment prepared in 1991 during the establishment of the Refuge; the vegetative survey report prepared in 1995; a Cultural Resource Overview study prepared in 1997; the Polk County Comprehensive Local Water Management Plan; aerial photographs; and numerous state and Federal maps. Much of the information has been incorporated into a computerized geographic information system. (A bibliography listing all of the resources used in preparation of this Comprehensive Conservation Plan is included in Appendix B.)

Planning Issues

Issues, concerns, and opportunities were gathered in the first citizen and public meetings and have been grouped together and summarized into major categories. Issues are either occurring at the present time and need to be resolved or could occur if the plan is implemented.



Water Management

Many of the lakes, wetlands, and water flows in the Refuge landscape have been altered over the years for fish rearing, farming, or aesthetic purposes. Most of the alterations were completed without permits or approval from the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources. Some people strongly favor restoring the hydrologic system on the Refuge to its original character. Removing all of the water control structures and channels on the Refuge, however, could limit some waterfowl management capabilities and

hamper some fishery values demonstration opportunities. In addition, a county drainage ditch affects several wetlands on the Refuge.

Water Quality

Water quality within the Refuge, particularly in Tamarack Lake, is influenced by land management practices on lands draining into County Ditch 73. Water quality in Maple Lake, downstream of Tamarack Lake, is a major concern to local residents. Some people feel that potential projects could be identified to improve water quality and demonstrate effective water quality management practices on and off the Refuge.

Community Involvement

The local community is very interested in participating in the decisions that have an impact on the future direction of the Refuge. Former landowners, volunteers, and other individuals want to contribute and be involved in Refuge management and programs. The human history of the area (settlement, reliance on the land, structures) is of special interest and should play a role in the education and interpretation programs.

Public Use

Rydell National Wildlife Refuge presents a wide range of both issues and opportunities for Federal planners and the surrounding community. They include:

- Opinions vary on how to maintain the improvements made by the former owner, including trails, roads, observation structures, and buildings that provide visitor access to the Refuge.
- There is concern about the level of use that would be consistent with the natural resource values of the Refuge.
- Accessibility to the landscape, facilities, hunting and fishing, and other programs is a major concern.

Interpretive and Educational Potential

Most people support the concept of using Refuge resources and facilities to interpret the natural environment, educate about natural resources management, and demonstrate effective conservation techniques.

Habitat Restoration and Management

A wide range of habitat restoration and management decisions challenge Rydell National Wildlife Refuge, including:

- Control of exotic species such as Eurasian buckthorn, spotted knapweed, reed canary grass, and leafy spurge;
- Protection of unique natural communities such as the Sundew Bog, prairie remnants, and high quality maple/basswood forests;
- Limited habitat for forest interior species due to fragmentation of the existing forested habitat;
- Management and alteration of non-native plantings such as shelterbelts and conifer plantations; and
- Distribution and quantity of grassland, forest, and wetland habitat.